The Literary Program

1998 National Black Arts Festival:
Art Beyond Borders

Connie G. Cross
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THE PROGRAM

Saturday, July 11

Conversation: The Direction of Gay and Lesbian Literature
Barbara Smith, moderator; with E. Lynn Harris, James Earl Hardy, Lisa C. Moore, Kathleen E. Morris. ***10 a.m., Renaissance Hotel, Free***

Sunday, July 12

Poetry Reading Nikky Finney, host; with Yusef Komunyakaa, Ishmael Reed, Sonia Sanchez ***7 p.m., Ferst Center for the Performing Arts at Georgia Tech University, $10***

Tribute to Henry Dumas Eugene Redmond hosts a reading/tribute to the late poet and fiction writer marking the 30th anniversary of his death.
11 p.m., Norcross Room at Renaissance Hotel, Free

Monday, July 13

Conversation: Interpreting Literature Through Other Art Forms
Reg. E. Gaines, moderator; with Bridgett Davis, Elizabeth Van Dyke, Kevin Sipp.
10 a.m., Renaissance Hotel, Free

Fiction Reading
Colin Channer, host; with Paul Beatty, Diane McKinney-Whetstone, A.J. Verdelle, Shay Youngblood. ***7 p.m., Ferst Center for the Performing Arts at Georgia Tech University, $10***

Knew School: An Evening With Emerging Poets of Atlanta
Hosted by D-Knowledge. ***10 p.m., Yin Yang Cafe, $5***

Tuesday, July 14

Conversation: Words & Music: What Music Means to the Writer
Jerry Ward Jr., moderator; with Joan Morgan, Charlie Braxton, Ntozake Shange.
10 a.m., Renaissance Hotel, Free

Poetry Reading: Emerging Voices
Catherine Smith Jones, host; with Rohan Preston, Andrea Wren, Charlie Braxton, Kupenda Auset, Ruth Forman, Tony Medina, Lenard D. Moore, D-Knowledge.
7 p.m., Renaissance Hotel Ballroom, $10

Wednesday, July 15

Conversation: The Art of Biography Valerie Boyd, moderator; with Melba Joyce Boyd, Evelyn C. White, Robert O'Meally
10 a.m., Renaissance Hotel, Free

Tribute to Leon Forrest A reading/tribute to the late novelist, hosted by Rohan Preston. ***4 p.m.-6 p.m., Norcross Room at Renaissance Hotel, Free***

Jerry W. Ward, Jr., a literary critic and poet, is the Lawrence Durgin Professor of Literature at Tougaloo College, where he has taught since 1970. His poems and essays have appeared in literary and scholarly journals and in such anthologies as *Catch the Fire*, *Dark Eros*, and *Sturdy Black Bridges*. His works-in-progress include *Reading Race, Reading America: Social and Literary Essays* and *To Shatter the Iris of Innocence*. He edited *Trouble the Water: 250 Years of African American Poetry*.

Evelyn C. White is the author of *Chain Chain Change: For Black Women in Abusive Relationships*. She is also the editor of *The Black Women's Health Book: Speaking For Ourselves*, the landmark collection that received numerous awards including the Women's Health Education Project Award in New York. A nationally recognized lecturer on feminist issues, Ms. White is a visiting scholar in women's studies at Mills College in Oakland, Calif., and is the official biographer of Alice Walker. The biography is under contract with W.W. Norton.

Daniel Jerome Wideman is the co-editor of *Soulfires: Young Black Men on Love and Violence*. He is currently working on a novel, *A Ticket 'Til Morning*, and a book of nonfiction, *The Door of No Return?: A Journey Through the Legacy of the African Slave Forts*. A graduate of Brown University, he has studied at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies and was a writer-in-residence at the DuBois Centre for Pan-African Culture in Accra, Ghana. He lives in Durham, N.C.

John Edgar Wideman, acclaimed novelist and nonfiction writer, is professor of English at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Among his many books are *A Glance Away*, *Hurry Home*, *The Lynchers*, *Hiding Place*, *Damballah*, *Brothers and Keepers*, *Homewood Trilogy*, *Fever*, *The Stories of John Edgar Wideman*, and *The Homewood Books*. His numerous literary awards include the Pen-Faulkner Award for Fiction for *Sent For You Yesterday* and *Philadelphia Fire*.

Saul Williams is an award-winning actor, poet and author of the forthcoming book *The Seventh Octave*.

Andrea M. Wren, a native of East St. Louis, Ill., attended Spelman College. Her poetry, fiction and book reviews have appeared in *African American Review*, *Catalyst*, *Family: A Celebration*, *In the Tradition: An Anthology of Young Black Writers*, *Obsidian II: Black Literature in Review*, *Open Fist: An Anthology of Young Illinois Poets*, *The Original Chicago Blues Annual*, and *Word Up: Black Poetry of the 80s From the Deep South*. She is a contributing editor to *Drumvoices Revue* and associate editor of *Eyeball*, a literary journal.

Shay Youngblood is author of the novel *Soul Kiss*; a collection of short fiction, *The Big Mama Stories*; and the plays "Shakin' the Mess Out of Misery," "Talking Bones" and "Black Power Barbie." She lives in New York and is currently working on a novel set in Paris.

Kenneth Zakee began writing poetry as a child, and in 1990 self-published his first book of poetry, *Revelations to Manifestation*. He has since delighted audiences with his rhythmic poetry and storytelling. He is a member of WORDSONG, a group of poets, dancers and musicians.

The Literary Program

1998 National Black Arts Festival:
Art Beyond Borders

Black Cinematheque:

THE INDEPENDENT STRUT / THE HOLLYWOOD SHUFFLE

From the earliest days of the American film industry, at the turn of the century, there has been a distinct African-American presence on the silver screen. Unfortunately, given the anomolous position of blacks in the national psyche, the image projected has borne little relationship to reality. For blacks have had little or no control over the production, economics or evolving rhetoric of filmic fantasy-building.

In the past, blacks would seem to have been a natural for a medium which thrives on the contrasts between black and white, Light and shadow. But our various skin colors, features, behavioral traits and speech patterns, histories and social structures were distorted and misrepresented—so distorted and misrepresented, in fact, that in many cases real black people were inadequate to the task of manifesting the required exaggeration. Instead, whites in blackface were employed.

Eventually, though, many talented African-Americans were employed in the industry. And how their talent still shines in those old films!

We celebrate their brilliance while analyzing with new perspective and covered the country, film cans in-hand, building their own distribution networks among churches and small neighborhood theaters. The seeds they planted are flowering now with the growing cadre of African-American independent filmmakers. And there is parallel growth both on the African continent and throughout the Diaspora.

Not only is the number of filmmakers growing, but so are their audiences and acclaim as they win awards at home and abroad. Praiseworthy indeed is the distance they have traveled, as well as the integrity of their visions, esthetically stunning and socially challenging, which black people the world over for so long have thirsted to see. Our stories and styles of telling them make clear the rich legacy from our African forebears: our spiritual and moral orientation, our historical resistance to oppression and our cultural creativity as manifested by our verbal eloquence, musical innovation, body language, social interaction, personal adornment and physical rhythms and speech patterns.

These films lovingly mirror us in all our multiple reality and allow us to recognize that we are an African people still.

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Eventually, though, many talented African-Americans were employed in the industry. And how their talent still shines in those old films!

We celebrate their brilliance while analyzing with new perspective the cage of contradictions in which these black performers were locked.

At the same time, and against all odds, there were a few iconoclasts—black men who made black films for black people from a black perspective. Oscar Micheaux and Spencer Williams are the best known of these early entrepreneurs. They produced their films on shoe string budgets and covered the country, film cans in-hand, building their own distribution networks among churches and small neighborhood theaters. The seeds they planted are flowering now with the growing cadre of African-American independent filmmakers. And there is parallel growth both on the African continent and throughout the Diaspora.

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Cheryl Chisholm, Film Consultant

THE INDEPENDENT STRUT

PREMIERE

"CHAMELEON STREET" 1990 98 min.

NBAF is proud to present the southeastern premiere of this year's Grand Jury prize-winner at the Sundance United States Film Festival. This film has made its young star/writer/director, Wendell B. Harris, Jr., one of the most sought-after new talents to emerge from the black independent cinema movement. Produced by his mother and his brother (yet another brother served as still photographer) and financed largely by black business people in the Flint, Michigan, area, this is a stylishly authoritative work with an original creative vision. Based on a true story, "Chameleon Street" follows the life and career(s) of Douglas Street (played by Harris), the "chameleon." He is a master impersonator who moves through life as a doctor (operating on patients), a lawyer (trying cases) or as whomever he decides to become next. Street narrates his own story. He has some insight into the problems his various masks conceal, but only from his own off-kilter perspective. Critic Clyde Taylor sees in Street reflections of "the existentialist shammers of Richard Wright or Ellison," the moral monsters born of limited possibilities. The film's distributor notes that the character's real-life counterpart was released from prison in time to act as a consultant on the film.

Dates: **July 28 thru Aug. 5 1:30, 4:30 & 7:30 pm**
Venue: **LeFont Plaza Theater**
Admission: **$5.00; $2.50 for senior citizens and children 12 and under**

PREMIERE

"CAMP DE THIAROYE" 1989 152 min.

Ousmane Sembene, the Senegalese father of African cinema, sends us a new film at long last. Hailed at FESPACO, the 1989 Pan-African Festival of Cinema at Ouagadougou, and at festivals around the world since that time, this film adds one more precious chapter to Sembene's work. That impressive portfolio includes "Black Girl," "Emitai," "Xala" and "Ceddo." The film, co-produced by the nations of Senegal, Tunisia and Algeria, is set near the end of World War II. A group of West African infantrymen debark at the port of Dakar, eager to head for their homes in the Ivory Coast, Gabon, Niger and, of course, Senegal. First, however, they must get their pay. And thereby hangs the tale, a tale of racist colonial arrogance based on a historical tragedy. Sembene tells the story largely through the eyes of Sergeant-Major Diatta, a well-read law student in Paris before the war, a man who loves both French classical music and the sound of Charlie Parker. For African-Americans, the parallels are clear. The sense of time and place is manifested in the inimitable style of this master, who continues to inspire filmmakers across the African diaspora.

Dates: **July 28 thru Aug. 5, 1, 4 & 7 pm**

SNEAK PREVIEW

"TO SLEEP WITH ANGER" 1990 85 min.

Drawing on the symbols of black folklore and spiritual tradition, renowned independent filmmaker Charles Burnett renders a powerful drama about the genesis of evil within the black community. Starring Danny Glover, in one of his best roles to date, this film also features Mary Alice, Carl Lumbly, Vonetta McGee and Sheryl Lee Ralph. Glover plays a visitor to a divided Los Angeles household who scatters seeds of doubt and stirs up conflicts. This is the latest work by the director of that masterpiece of black independent cinema, "Killer of Sheep."

Date: **Aug. 3, 8 pm**

"ANCESTRAL LEGACY"

In conjunction with its Ancestral Legacy exhibition, the High Museum of Art presents an outstanding selection of experimental work by contemporary African, Caribbean and African-American filmmakers, including: "ICONO NEGRO: THE BLACK AESTHETIC IN VIDEO ART," the first interantional collection of video art by and about African diaspora electronic imagemakers. Included are works by Peter Harvey and Mario Andrews, Tony Magri and Lucila Meirelles and presentation producer Thomas, Carlos de Jesus, Doris Chase and Thulani Davis, Lawrence Philip Mallory Jones.

Date: **Aug. 2, 8 pm** ■ ***Venue:*** **WAC/Hill Auditorium**
Admission: **$3.00; $2.50 for students and senior citizens; $2.00 for museum members**

"PATAKIN"

This musical by Manual Octavio Gomez transplants two traditional Yoruba characters to modern-day Havana. It's a comic/heroic battle of wits that is half mythology and half "West Side Story."

Date: **Aug. 2, 8 pm** ■ ***Venue:*** **WAC/Rich Auditorium**
Admission: **$3.00; $2.50 for students and senior citizens; $2.00 for museum members**

"YELEEN (BRIGHTNESS)"

By Souleymane Cisee of Mali, has been hailed as noteworthy African cinema. The story of a young hero's search for knowledge, it interweaves tribal magic and primordial conflict between fathers and sons.

Date: **Aug. 3, 8 pm** ■ ***Venue:*** **WAC/Rich Auditorium**
Admission: **$3.00; $2.50 for students; $2.00 for museum members**

THE INDEPENDENT STRUT: A Lecture/Video Show On Black Independent Cinema

CLYDE TAYLOR, critic, scholar, author, lecturer and film curator, will present an innovative lecture on the history of the black independent cinema movement. It will be highlighted with illustrations from a wide range of films dating from the early works of Micheaux and Williams to recent works by Woodberry, Dash, Gerima and Chenzira. Dr. Taylor is currently working on a book of essays exploring post-esthetic theory in the context of black film culture. He has published in *Black Collegian, Black Scholar, The Black Film Review, First World, Afterimage, Frame-work* and many other scholarly and popular journals.

Date: **July 29, 2 pm** ■ ***Venue:*** **Atlanta-Fulton Public Library Auditorium**

THE HOLLYWOOD SHUFFLE

THE HOLLYWOOD SHUFFLE: A Lecture/Slide Show on Black Hollywood

DONALD BOGLE, critic, scholar, author, lecturer and television producer, will present his popular illustrated talk on the history of African Americans in the Hollywood film industry.

Date: **Aug. 5, 2 pm** ■ ***Venue:*** **Atlanta Fulton County Public Library Auditorium**

A combination of flagrant stereotypes and mind-blowing talent, these films manifest a dramatic contradiction at the heart of American culture. Huge is the talent therein and deplorable the social, economic and political structures which limited their scope.

"BLACK AND TAN" 1929

The art deco style of the period and lavish Busby Berkeley musicals establish the mood of this marvelous short starring Duke Ellington and his orchestra.

"HALLELUJAH" 1929

One of Hollywood's most important all-black films, this movie set the tone for the treatment of black casts by placing them in an idealized, isolated world. King Vidor, its white director, thought that "talkies" were the perfect vehicle for exploring "real Negro folk culture." With handsome Daniel Hayes in the role originally intended for Paul Robeson, Nina Mae McKinney, "the sepia temptress," and spirituals sung by the Dixie Jubilee Choir, this film contains music, dancing and language indeed expressive of black folk culture despite the stereotypical characters and plot. Shot partly on location in the swamps and forests of Tennessee and Arkansas, the film has long stretches of beauty and power: the lines of white-robed supplicants awaiting baptism by the river form an indelible image.

Date: **July 30, 3 pm** ■ ***Venue:*** **Atlanta-Fulton Public Library Auditorium (for all films in this series)**

"RHAPSODY IN BLACK AND BLUE" 1932

Hollywood's recognition of our African roots—a musical comedy in which Louis Armstrong dons a leopardskin outfit. But the music is great!

"IMITATION OF LIFE" 1934

White author Fannie Hurst was deeply hurt when Sterling Brown found this film, the first to be made from her novel, to be racist. His review, entitled "Once a Pancake," is a classic of early black film criticism. The film, a depression-era fantasy of two single mothers—one black, one white—who strike it rich (on the strength of the black woman's pancake recipe), stars Louis Beavers, Fredi Washington and Claudette Colbert. According to *Variety*, Miss Beavers stole the show: "Picture is stolen by the Negress, Louise Beavers, whose performance is masterly. This lady can troupe. She took the whole scale of emotions from joy to anguish and never sounded a false note." Today's audiences may be more moved by Miss Washington's Peola, haunted and self-destructive, as she seeks an alternative to her mother's total and voluntary subjugation. The elaborate funeral sequence won't leave a dry eye in the house.

Date: **July 31, 3 pm**

"THE ANSWER TO OPEN THE DOOR RICHARD" 1947

Stepin Fetchit is the man who made an art (and a very good living) out of the shuffle. While others struggled and complained, even gave up careers rather than play insulting roles, he apparently embraced the opportunities he was given. Here, with the support of Earl Bostic and his orchestra, he plays "Lazy Richard," who won't get up and open the door.

"THE HOLLYWOOD SHUFFLE" 1987

Many would say that Stepin Fetchit should have taken Robert Townsend's revolutionary advice and gotten a job at the post office. Townsend's witty and fast-paced hit, self-funded with the aid of credit cards, is that rare treat: a delightfully pleasurable film which makes you think. Townsend plays struggling actor Bobby Taylor. He works at a hot dog stand, day-dreams of being the first Black Rambo or Superman and sneaks off to auditions for roles as pimps, slaves or "the next Eddy Murphy." He wants all the perks—Oscars, limos, adoring fans, but he also wants the respect of his little brother and his girl. What to do, what to do? No one interested in the issue of blacks in film should miss the Famous Black Acting School skit! Thank you, Robert Townsend, for our series' title.

Date: **Aug. 1, 3 pm**

"SARAH VAUGHN SINGS" early 1950s

The divine and sassy Sarah sings three songs accompanied by a big band: *The Nearness of You, The Things I Offer You for a Lifetime* and *You're Not the Kind of a Boy for a Girl Like Me.* We miss you, Sarah!

"CARMEN JONES" 1954

Time magazine said: "Energy . . . is the essence of this picture; the audience is not merely stimulated, it is all but electrocuted." And why not? This big screen, all black version of Bizet's opera has got young and nasty Brock Peters, vital and cantankerous Pearl Bailey, sweet and innocent Diahann Carroll, viral and handsome Harry Belafonte, quick glimpses of Max Roach and Carmen De Lavallade and a passionate, Oscar-nominated performance by Dorothy Dandridge. Director Otto Preminger still subscribed to the familiar Hollywood idea of "a high time in Darky Town" but this is a big, lavish musical wherein each talented performer transcends the built-in corniness of the plot and bursts through the skin of the steratypical characters. It is to be noted that both Dandridge and Belafonte, though singers, had their arias dubbed by Marilyn Horne and LeVern Hutcherson, respectively.

Date: **Aug. 2, 3 pm**

"HARLEM HOTSHOTS" early 1940s

Lena Horne and Teddy Wilson are just two of the performers featured in this short.

"CAB CALLOWAY'S JITTERBUG PARTY" early 1940s

Cab and his band finish a late set at the Cotton Club with *Razz-ma-Tazz* and *Long About Midnight*, then head uptown to Harlem where they play *Call of the Jitterbug* while the folks do some serious dancing.

"SUPERFLY" 1972

This film set a new and controversial stereotype, the street hustler as hero. Actor Ron O'Neal is superb as the fantasy drug dealer who, in contrast to a realistic drug scene in a realistic Harlem, sells his wares only to white people, defeats the white mob which controls his operation, gets out of the drug business with his body and fortune intact and rides off at the end with his lady, Gordon Parks, Jr. directed this story, which became the pattern for scores of other Blaxploitation films. Curtis Mayfield's score for the soundtrack remains a classic.

Date: **Aug. 3, 3 pm**

FILM PICNIC IN THE PARK

The Atlanta African Film Society invites film lovers to bring their picnics to Piedmont Park and join them for a screening under the stars.

"BUCK AND THE PREACHER" 1972

Sidney Poitier directed this truly entertaining black western comedy in which he also co-starred with Harry Belafonte. Sidney is the serious wagon-master leading a group of freed slaves west to homesteading territory after the Civil War. Harry plays a feisty, funky conman/preacher—a true eccentric. Also in the cast are Ruby Dee, Clarence Muse, Lynn Hamilton and James McEachin.

Date: **July 31, 8 pm (Raindate: 8/1, 8 pm)**

FAMILY FILM SERIES

The whole family will enjoy these entertaining and enlightening programs, a carefully selected combination of features and shorts, made both by black independents and Hollywood studios, which celebrate black heritage and traditions of empowerment.

"SOUNDER" 1972

This black family drama earned Oscar nominations for Cecily Tyson and Paul Winfield. It also featured marvelous performances by Janet Maclachlan and a young Kevin Hooks. With a script written by Lonnie Elder III, the story is set in rural Louisiana in the 1930's and dramatizes the struggles of a family of share croppers trying to survive after the father is imprisoned for stealing food to feed his family.

"HAIRPIECE: A FILM FOR NAPPYHEADED PEOPLE" 1984

This short classic from the black independent cinema movement is a perennial favorite. Director Ayoka Chenzira explores black folks' confusion about their hair in this witty, animated piece.

Dates: **July 30 & Aug. 2, 10 am** ■ ***Venue:*** **Atlanta-Fulton Public Library (except where noted)**

"ZAJOTA AND THE BOOGEY SPIRIT" 1989

Director Ayoka Chenzira has done it again, this time employing her witty style of animation in tracing the "soul" of African American people from African ritual to contemporary urban hiphop culture.

"BRIGHT ROAD" 1953

A year before she sizzled in "Carmen Jones," Dorothy Dandridge made this appealing movie. Here she is the young, innocent, pert and pretty schoolteacher who tries to help a troubled student. Making his film debut as the school's principal is the young, innocent, handsome and shy Harry Belafonte. The student is played by Philip Hepburn, and Maidie Norman and Vivian Dandridge have small roles.

Dates: **July 31 & Aug. 3, 10 am**

"JOHN HENRY"

This delightful short is enlivened by a soundtrack featuring Roberta Flack's rendition of the traditional ballad about John Henry.

"CLARENCE AND ANGEL" 1975

This film, by black independent director Robert Gardner, has become a classic in a short time. In a crowded public school in New York City, Clarence, the illiterate and stuttering son of illiterate migrant workers, meets Angel, the hyperactive, bright and bored bane of his teacher's existence. In the hall where they are both placed regularly as punishment, they become friends and begin to solve each other's problems.

Date: **Aug. 1, 10 am**
PLEASE NOTE: **This film will be screened at SOUTHWEST REGIONAL BRANCH LIBRARY 3665 Cascade Road, S.W.**

"ANANSI" 1969

This animated short graphically relates the adventures of Anansi, the cunning spider who is the trickster/hero of the Ashanti people of Ghana.

"SUGAR CANE ALLEY" 1983

One of the most successful films ever to come out of the African Diaspora, this film has been screened many times and is always in demand. Euzhan Palcy, from the island of Martinique, created it from one of the literary classics of her native land. Her script, developed over many years as she learned her filmmaking skills, details the joys and sorrows of a young boy's education, facilitated by his farseeing grandmother, in the cane fields and strict schools of a French colonial outpost at the turn of the century. The film is in French with English subtitles, but don't worry. Between the strong visual storytelling and the engaging and familiar young characters, children take to this film like ducks to water!

Date: **Aug. 4, 10 am**

CREDITS:

Cheryl Chisholm
Film Consultant, NBAF

Ken Eastman
Film Programmer, Atlanta Fulton County Public Library

Linda Dubler
Film/Video Curator, High Museum of Art

Monica Freeman
Film Programmer, Atlanta African Film Society

Wendell B. Harris, Jr.
Actor/Writer/Director, ***Chameleon Street***

Philip Mallory Jones
Guest Curator, ***Icono Negro: The Black Aesthetic in Video Art***

Clyde Taylor
Film Critic/Historian

Charles Burnett
Independent Filmmaker, ***To Sleep with Anger***

Donald Bogle
Author/Lecturer/Producer, ***Blacks in American Films and Television***

Thomas Burns
Technical Assistant, NBAF

Nicole Wright
Staff Assistant, NBAF

April Hall
Program Assistant, NBAF

Photo Credit: BUCK and the PREACHER (1972) Columbia Pictures and E&R Productions/Belafonte Enterprises Film.

The 1990 National Black Arts Festival Film Program was made possible with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs, the Fulton County Arts Council, the Atlanta-Fulton County Public Library, the High Museum of Art, the Atlanta Third World Film Festival and the Atlanta African Film Society.

Descriptive material paraphrased from **Blacks in American Films and Television: An Illustrated Encyclopedia** by Donald Bogle.

NATIONAL BLACK ARTS FESTIVAL 1990